

IN THE CLAIMS

This is a complete and current listing of the claims, marked with status identifiers in parentheses. The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

1. **(Currently Amended)** A vacuum contactor, comprising:

- a contactor housing;
- a drive coil;
- an armature;
- an operating element; and

at least one vacuum contact, wherein the drive coil is adapted to deflect the armature from an armature rest position to an armature operating position when a pull-in current is applied, wherein the deflection of the armature is adapted to cause the operating element to be deflected from an element rest position to an element operating position, wherein the deflection of the operating element is adapted to result in closing of the at least one vacuum contact, wherein when the armature is deflected from the armature rest position to the armature operating position, the armature is adapted to first pass through an initial movement distance and is then adapted to pass through a driving movement distance, with the operating element being deflected by the armature only while the armature is passing through the driving movement distance, and wherein the vacuum contactor operating element is adapted such that, for any current less than the pull-in current, the operating element ~~to always~~ either remains in the element rest position or ~~be is~~ deflected completely to the element operating position ~~when a current that is less than the pull-in the~~ current is applied to the drive coil.

Claims 2-8 (Cancelled)

9. **(Original)** The vacuum contact as claimed in claim 1, wherein the ratio of the initial movement distance to the driving movement distance is between 1:3 and 3:1.

10. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 1, wherein the ratio of the initial movement distance to the driving movement distance is between 2:3 and 3:2.

11. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 1, wherein the armature is deflected by the drive coil against an initial movement force while it is passing through the initial movement distance, and against a driving force while it is passing through the driving movement distance, and wherein the initial movement force is less than the driving force.

12. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 11, wherein the ratio of the initial movement force to the driving force is between 1:10 and 1:2.

13. **(Original)** The vacuum contact as claimed in claim 11, wherein the ratio of the initial movement force to the driving force is between 1:5 and 1:4.

14. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 11, wherein the initial movement force is applied by an initial movement spring device, and the driving force is applied by a driving spring device, wherein the initial movement spring device is supported firstly on the armature and secondly on the operating element, and wherein the driving spring device is supported firstly on the operating element and secondly on the contactor housing.

15. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 1, wherein the operating element includes a stop, against which the armature is moved when it is deflected from the armature rest position.

16. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 9, wherein the armature is deflected by the drive coil against an initial movement force while it is passing through the

initial movement distance, and against a driving force while it is passing through the driving movement distance, and wherein the initial movement force is less than the driving force.

17. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 16, wherein the ratio of the initial movement force to the driving force is between 1:10 and 1:2.

18. **(Original)** The vacuum contact as claimed in claim 16, wherein the ratio of the initial movement force to the driving force is between 1:5 and 1:4.

19. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 10, wherein the armature is deflected by the drive coil against an initial movement force while it is passing through the initial movement distance, and against a driving force while it is passing through the driving movement distance, and wherein the initial movement force is less than the driving force.

20. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 19, wherein the ratio of the initial movement force to the driving force is between 1:10 and 1:2.

21. **(Original)** The vacuum contact as claimed in claim 19, wherein the ratio of the initial movement force to the driving force is between 1:5 and 1:4.

22. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 12, wherein the initial movement force is applied by an initial movement spring device, and the driving force is applied by a driving spring device, wherein the initial movement spring device is supported firstly on the armature and secondly on the operating element, and wherein the driving spring device is supported firstly on the operating element and secondly on the contactor housing.

23. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 13, wherein the initial movement force is applied by an initial movement spring device, and the driving force is applied by a driving spring device, wherein the initial movement spring device is supported firstly on the

armature and secondly on the operating element, and wherein the driving spring device is supported firstly on the operating element and secondly on the contactor housing.

24. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 9, wherein the operating element includes a stop, against which the armature is moved when it is deflected from the armature rest position.

25. **(Original)** The vacuum contactor as claimed in claim 11, wherein the operating element includes a stop, against which the armature is moved when it is deflected from the armature rest position.

26. **(Currently Amended)** A method of operating a vacuum contactor including a drive coil, an armature, an operating element, and at least one vacuum contact, comprising:

applying a pull-in current to the drive coil to deflect the armature from an armature rest position to an armature operating position;

causing, from the deflection of the armature, the operating element to be deflected from an element rest position to an element operating position;

causing, from the deflection of the operating element, closing of the at least one vacuum contact; and

causing, when the armature is deflected from the armature rest position to the armature operating position, the armature to first pass through an initial movement distance and then pass through a driving movement distance, with the operating element being deflected by the armature only while the armature is passing through the driving movement distance, and wherein the vacuum contactor operating element is adapted such that, for any current less than the pull-in current, the operating element ~~to always~~ either remains in the element rest position or

~~be is~~ deflected completely to the element operating position ~~when a current that is less than the pull-in~~ the current is applied to the drive coil.

27. **(Currently Amended)** An apparatus, comprising:

a vacuum contactor including a drive coil, an armature, an operating element, and at least one vacuum contact; and

means for applying a pull-in current to the drive coil to deflect the armature from an armature rest position to an armature operating position, wherein, from the deflection of the armature, the operating element is adapted to be deflected from an element rest position to an element operating position, wherein, from the deflection of the operating element, the at least one vacuum contact is adapted to be closed, wherein, when the armature is deflected from the armature rest position to the armature operating position, the armature is adapted to first pass through an initial movement distance and then pass through a driving movement distance, with the operating element being deflected by the armature only while the armature is passing through the driving movement distance, and wherein the vacuum contactor operating element is adapted such that, for any current less than the pull-in current, the operating element ~~to always~~ either remains in the element rest position or ~~be is~~ deflected completely to the element operating position ~~when a current that is less than the pull-in~~ the current is applied to the drive coil.